

Emerging Adults and the Justice System

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*“(W)e have not paid enough attention to the later teenage and early adult years as a **discrete period of social and behavioral development**... If we hope to gain a complete understanding of what works to prevent delinquency from evolving into persistent criminal behavior, we need to look more closely at this critical stage of life and develop our sense of effective interventions and categories of appropriate sanctions.”*

Assistant Attorney General Laurie O. Robinson

Foreword, *From Delinquency to Adult Crime*

Oxford University Press (June 2011)



What is an “emerging adult”?

(And why 18 – 25?)

- Developmental psychology
- Neurobiology
- Criminology
- Common sense and life experience?



What is an “emerging adult”?

Developmental Perspectives

- **Erickson** (1968): Prolonged adolescence... psychosocial moratorium on responsibilities...
- **Keniston** (1971): Tension between self and society... a “refusal” of socialization
- **Levinson** (1978): Age 17 – 33 (!) = a “novice phase” of stability seeking and identity construction



What is an “emerging adult”?

Developmental Perspectives

Jeffrey Jensen Arnett

Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens Through the Twenties (American Psychologist, May 2000)

...I propose a new theory of development from the late teens through the twenties, with a focus on ages 18 – 25... (T)his period, emerging adulthood, is **neither adolescence nor adulthood, but is theoretically and empirically distinct from them both**... Having left the dependency of childhood and adolescence and having not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood, emerging adults often explore a variety of possible life directions in love, work, and worldviews. Emerging adulthood is **a time of life when many different directions remain possible, when little about the future has been decided for certain**, when the scope of independent exploration of life’s possibilities is greater for most people than it will be at any other period of the life course... **When adults later consider the most important events in their lives, they most often name events that took place during this period.”**



What is an emerging adult?

- “The theory of emerging adulthood was proposed as a framework for recognizing that the transition to adulthood was now long enough that it constituted not merely a transition but *a separate period of the life course.*”

Emerging Adulthood: What Is It, and What Is It Good For? (Child Development Perspectives) Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, December 2007



What is an emerging adult?

*“The swift spread of the term and the idea has surprised me because normally any new theoretical idea meets initial resistance... Perhaps, the acceptance of emerging adulthood has been so swift because there really was no reigning paradigm. Instead, there was a widespread sense among scholars interested in this age period that **previous ways of thinking about it no longer worked and there was a hunger for a new conceptualization.**”*

Emerging Adulthood: What Is It, and What Is It Good For? (Child Development Perspectives) Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, December 2007



What does neuroscience tell us
about the **characteristics**
of emerging adults?



“Contrary to legal assumptions, age 18 is not a fixed date of completion of maturational processes for all young people.”

Loeber & Farrington

From Delinquency to Adult Crime (Oxford University Press, 2011)

The human brain continues to develop until approximately age 25.

Different parts of the brain develop at different stages.

Maturity in one area does not necessarily mean control in another.

Cognitive maturity is not indicative of developmental maturity.

Physical maturity is not indicative of developmental maturity.

Peer influence plays an important role in emerging adulthood.

Psychological disorders and behavioral problems emerge...



Characteristics of Emerging Adulthood

- Risk
- Rewards
- Relationships
- Regulation
- Plasticity: Pruning and pathways



Characteristics of Emerging Adulthood

- **Risk & Rewards:**

- Sensation seeking; a desire for new and intense experiences
 - Sex (including unprotected)
 - Substance use, including binge drinking
 - Driving at high speeds / while intoxicated
- More attractive + likely more dangerous
 - Less experience
 - Neurological differences – THC, etc.
 - So... public health approaches?



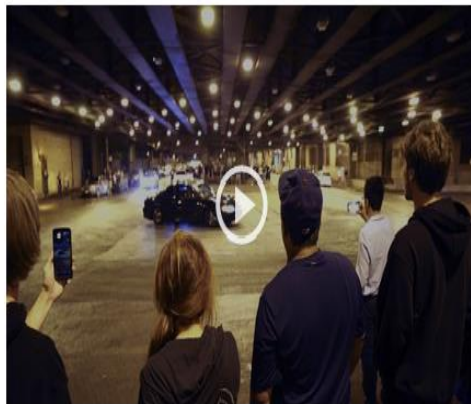
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News

Driving, skidding and drifting on Chicago's underground Lower Wacker track



A subculture of residents now and do car stunts on Chicago's Lower Wacker Drive during the late night and early morning hours, even though their actions aren't legal and have raised the concern of city officials.

Gregory Pratt and Quinn Ford • Contact Reporters
Chicago Tribune

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Meet the drivers, drag racers and 'drifters' of Lower Wacker

JULY 17, 2015, 7:30 AM

On weekend nights, as downtown streets go quiet, the depths of Wacker Drive begin to screech and whine.

Down two levels from the usual street traffic, in a hidden spot near the city pound, cars rev and peel across a stretch of asphalt between Field Boulevard and Stetson Avenue.

Crowds cheer as a man hangs out a car window, shooting video while the driver speeds in circles. A Mustang and a Lexus circle in concert with one another with the grace and synchronization of ice skaters. A sedan with a pizza sign on its side slides past. More cheers.

Bottom level
Lower Lower Wacker Drive



There are the drivers of lower Lower Wacker Drive, a forgotten road that has become a subterranean bazaar for teenagers and co-

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From this article



New Moore

Chicago Tribune July 17, 2015

"When you start doing it, you get in the zone. **And for me, there's something about the risk of me actually hitting something.**" Jaramillo, age 19.

"You know, **when the crowd applauds**, when I barely miss something by mere inches... It's fun. **It gets my blood boiling.**"



Chicago Tribune: July 20, 2015


20 year old Jose Luvianos was killed while drag racing his 2005 Jeep on lower Wacker Drive.

His best friend, 18 year old Ivan Sanchez, is now charged with reckless homicide and aggravated DUI.

www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/breaking/ct-lower-wacker-crash-charges-met-20150720-story.html

News / Local news / Breaking News

Lower Wacker racing ended in fatal crash, prosecutors say



One man was killed and another injured in a crash on Lower Wacker Drive in Chicago early July 18, 2015. (Tribune wire reports)

By Steve Schmadee, Tony Briscoe and Gregory Pratt · Contact Reporters
Chicago Tribune

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Prosecutors say drag-racing on Lower Wacker Drive ended in tragedy early Saturday.

JULY 20, 2015, 8:23 PM

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lots for gearheads — including a street race for those who like to drift — the friends returned to the track.

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Characteristics of Emerging Adulthood

- Risk + Reward + Relationships:
 - Peer influence in risk taking / offending
 - But also, desistance
- Regulation:
 - External (not so much)
 - Internal (getting there)



Characteristics of Emerging Adulthood

Plasticity: Pruning and pathways

“Studies are showing that adolescence is a second period of heightened brain plasticity, just like the first three years of life.

This makes adolescence a really vulnerable time, because the brain can be damaged by harmful experiences, but it also makes it a time of tremendous opportunity...

I think of adolescence today as beginning around age 10 and lasting until 25 or so for many people. ”

Lawrence Steinberg

Age of Opportunity : Lessons from the New Science of Adolescence (2014)



The impact of maltreatment: Dual Status Youth

Child maltreatment increases the likelihood of future delinquency / criminal justice involvement:

- Juvenile arrest: 59%
- Adult arrest: 28%
- Violent offense: 30%

Maltreated children were younger at first arrest, committed nearly twice as many offenses and were arrested more frequently. Early onset matters.

BUT! These relationships are neither inevitable nor deterministic.



So...

- “Are people in their early 20s more like teenagers or more like adults? According to this research: **It depends.**”
- “Changes in the ways in which we treat young adult offenders are long overdue.
- This group has its own distinctive needs...
- That’s an argument for treating them as a **special category** of offenders...”



A screenshot of a web browser displaying the New York Times article "Don't Treat Young Adults as Teenagers" by Gray Matter. The browser's address bar shows the URL: www.nytimes.com/2016/05/01/opinion/sunday/dont-treat-young-adults-as-teenagers.html. The page features a red GrubHub advertisement at the top with the text "Order food you love" and "Get the app". Below the advertisement, the article title "Don't Treat Young Adults as Teenagers" is displayed, followed by the byline "Gray Matter" and the authors "By LAURENCE STEINBERG, THOMAS SHROPSHIRE, ELIZABETH S. SCOTT and RICHARD J. BONNIE APRIL 29, 2016". The main image shows a close-up of a person's face next to a birthday cake with lit candles. A red GrubHub advertisement is also visible on the right side of the article. At the bottom of the browser window, a taskbar shows various open applications including Google Chrome, Firefox, and several Microsoft Office Word documents.

Takeaways:

Emerging Adults are different and those differences matter

- **Prevalence:** The developmental characteristics of young adults can bring them into contact with the criminal justice system.
- **Characteristics:** Dealing with young adults is **different** than dealing with fully mature adults – or with younger teens
 - Challenges
 - Opportunities
- **ROI:** This age group remains highly amenable to rehabilitative interventions and positive change.
- **Strategies:** Adapting policy and practice accordingly can produce better results

